

BEYOND THE MIST

A little-known mystery is that there are about our planet places strangely irradiated with power, a light not of this World. Like a narrow or expanded torch-beam, these spots or areas can be quite small, even just a house, but they can also cover many acres; although it has been my experience that whether small or large they always had fairly clear boundaries, after which the emanating radiation diminishes before vanishing altogether. These areas of power and light are not eternally static; their regions of untrammelled radiation are affected by areas of comparative darkness, and entirely shattered if violence and evil intrude in strength within their radiance; but where such brilliance exists, it has an incredible effect on nature and people, even on those who are not consciously aware of this special enveloping Light.

Such concentrated areas of light and power were better recognised in the far past, as in the days of the ancient Greeks, from where it has come down in legend that Athens, wholly or in part, was irradiated in just such a way. I cannot go into this wonderful phenomenon more thoroughly here; but I have known at least two such areas on Earth that were beyond any doubt irradiated in this fashion, and it is about one that this story of mine took place some 30 years ago. Sadly, since I was there for the space of a year the core of this illumination was desecrated by the most savage murders and atrocities, which completely shattered the previous radiating magic:

There was once a small boarding school of not more than 135 boys lying some 18 miles into the heart of a range of low-lying mountains, none more than 8000 feet. This school at which I taught had been built on a spur of land about 5000 feet above sea-level, behind which stood a higher round-topped mountain, on which could be seen small herds of goats cropping the thin grass and lichens, watched by natives standing like statues on one leg, leaning comfortably in traditional fashion against body-length poles; while away to the east the land fell away from the blunt brow of the spur to valleys and tumbling streams, smooth rock slides and small curves of water to dam and make deeper, before rising in part to distant blue-grey horizons.

On one particular Sunday, tired after a short week-end and having just driven about 180 miles, I was now in the final 18-mile stretch back to the school in the late afternoon. My small car made easy running up the first slopes to my mountain kingdom, followed by two or three miles of gently inclining plateau; but as I drove my heart sank, for ahead of me I saw dark heavy clouds purling off a high saddle in sluggish, glutinous waves, billowing down in heavy bulging streamers, like a waterfall in slow motion, its furthest tendrils drifting lightly about the car as I neared the steeply rising road, and filling the deepening valley which cleft two mountains; a symbolic barrier to the Shangri-La that lay beyond.

Some mist was not unusual, especially late in the day, but on rare occasions it could be thick and heavy, funnelling down the vee-shaped mountain slopes, quickly filling the enclosed valley as densely as a pea-soup fog at sea, and rolling over the single winding road hacked from the mountainside, flanked on one side by mossy cliffs of packed earth and partially embedded rocks, while on the other fell a deepening valley as one climbed. Even a light mist called for caution, but I knew from previous experience when I had driven in deep fog on this narrow road with its occasional sharp bends, that visibility could be cut to barely three yards, with in places little more than a foot or so to spare from a bounding crash into the valley below, which made this an exceptionally hazardous road.

As I drew near to the curtain of fog and the narrowing and steepening road, I turned on my fog-lamp, changed to second gear, then to first as the deep mist with its blanketing silence enveloped my car; the only sound was the engine as it ground on up the mountain. My mind became tense, then faded back as my imagination tumbled me over into the darkening valley below; time seemed to drift, and it was with a nervous brush of apprehension that I could no longer remember how long this narrow, winding section lasted.

But my instincts were alert, for at one point, where the dark ribbon of road was particularly narrow on a sharp corner, the car shifted slightly to the left. I stopped, got out, and worked my way between the partially opened door and the boulder-encrusted bank, round the front of the car to the edge of the cliff. For a moment I froze, for half of the nearside wheel was overhanging the soft verge of the road and a near vertical drop. Worming my way back to the driving seat, I let the car drift downhill for a short distance, then drove on slowly, closely hugging the craggy bank. I had never been so close to going over the edge and crashing through the scree and stunted trees, the car turning in the air as it bounded off rocks and stunted trees down to the valley now far below; a dented and splintered wreck with my broken and shattered body inside.

As I drove on, time steadied and I became conscious of the mist lightening as the road curved towards the saddle, and I knew the worst was behind me. Then, like a drawn curtain, I burst through into clear light, while before me faced the familiar black rock face, broad and deep, dropping down to the valley below; but this time it was very different, for reaching across its whole width was a brilliant double rainbow, such as I had never seen before, nor since. There was magic here as it lay in twin bows of brilliant primary lights, merging between which lay a hundred subtle hues, and these repeated in both rainbows in such an orderly confusion of delicately blending colours, such as no artist could ever reproduce.

I got out of the car and walked to the edge of the road, absorbing this miracle of light, which in its transient luminosity drew from within me a great need to reach out and touch this wonder; but something held me back, for inwardly I knew that even this scenic wonder was but a prelude to something greater that lay beyond. I got back into the car and drove the last few hundred yards to the rim of the rock face, and an outer limit to the magic area as I knew it. Below, to my right, set against the hillside, wound a narrow graded murrum road, at the end of which lay the school, spread out on a graduated promontory of land like some toy in the evening shadow cast by the mountain behind it.

Once again I stopped the car, and turned off the engine; but this time because some guiding force drew me to a rounded rock that marked a high-point on the saddle. I sat down wearily after my tense drive through the thick fog, first looking over towards the school; then my gaze was drawn up to the gracefully passing rose-tinted clouds, as with dignity they slowly reshaped, drifting by in vast majestic aerial forms.

Mysteriously, the tensions of the mountain drive eased away as a wonderful sensation permeated through me, gently easing aside my tensions and tiredness, gathering me up as a helpless child, and heightening my senses in both mind and spirit. Enlightened, the very clouds were no longer just flowing streams of rose-tinted water vapour, re-forming and being borne along at the whim of any stratospheric winds; now, in the sun's dying rays, and with my more ethereally penetrating insight, the roseate clouds flowed silently by; then, as bidden by a higher power, fell back to form a backwash, a delicately coloured canvas on which shone an emerging brilliance embodying a clarity of life, love and sacrifice.

I staggered before the vastness of infinity, knelt in the face of truth, and bowed in humility at the state of peace, a peace of living vibrancy; and all in harmony with unlimited horizons, both near and far; so far that I could see neither the beginning nor the end. Time was no more, and space was but a pale shadow, for here mind and spirit ruled; but far beneath me in cruder states I could dimly see the outlines of binding dimensions gripping the world in a bondage of mankind's own making. Yet even as I looked I saw flashes of light lancing outwards, and so became aware that still there were some few who had the wish to know and the will to loosen their worldly bonds; these few were able to draw aside the limitations of earthly ties and glimpse in part the eternal magic.

Time passed, and for a while was no more. I was scarcely aware of my earthly body, but gazed in awe as this wonderful spirit of Life and beauty swept by before my eyes with a magnificence beyond all-telling, a complexity of intricately woven patterns merging into the infinite mysteries of Divine passage; all of which left an indelible hallmark in my life, one that with an effort I strive to recall when fear and failure threaten to overwhelm me. These visions flowed through my eyes and mind, drawn into my very soul; thus what I saw and knew then in clarity, I now perceive with difficulty as I dredge the finer fibres of my being; yet underlying this maze I am aware always that the measure of my inner mind is greater by far than my poor intellect endowed by nature; but hope upholds me, for I have been shown wonders that not many have seen.

The Divine message faded; the roseate hue glowed more beautifully still, then dimmed among the drifting clouds. Filled with Life and an overwhelming wish to tell those I knew of my vision, I rose and drove down to the school, anxious to spread what I had seen and experienced; but their eyes were blank, their minds filled with the week gone by and the tasks and pleasures that lay ahead; to all else their minds were closed, shut off from the beauty and reality that I had only just experienced. I felt alone in the crowded room, yet full of the wonder that had lifted me up to glimpse briefly the beauty and spirit of life in eternity. Quietly I left the noisy staffroom: Tomorrow I would be better able to face the school and the World, but what was left of today was mine to hold.

Even so, as dripping water can wear away the hardest rocks, so can time and trouble act as great erasures. Now, half a lifetime on, although these visions were deeply impressed, yet to recall their penetrating reality, I need to withdraw within myself and strive to grasp those sweeping scenes vivid and alive; for being mere mortal they become thrust aside to fade in the debris of our worldly cares, to slip away among the insane pace of life.

God help me never to lose this anchor of wonder and reality; yet with all my faults and weaknesses I find it harder now to live in the world with its false gods and intransigent ways, harder to live with my own soiled self, and in spite of my determination to cling to this brilliance, yet it drifts away and grows more distant.

The school and the area about has long since been spilled in blood, the magic withdrawn, and the mountains beyond my reach in a war-torn country. Was all this, perhaps, an impish 'blessing' born of my tired and over-stressed state? No, this I cannot accept, for even the more distant light must remain a staff to my life on this Earth.

[The venue was in the Vumba Mountains in the Eastern Highlands of Rhodesia. The school was Eagle School.]

**Christopher V. Cardew, November, 1999.
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DANCES WITH WORDS

Words - what are their worth,
That spill so freely from our lips?
That have the power to corrode and destroy,
Or within oneself to lift and build;
That can flow and tumble with a swinging rhythm,
Firm and sweeping in their gesture;
Or float like snowflakes on a winter's day,
Their softness an appeasement to the air's bitter bite,
Their pure shroud a mantle to our dreaming thoughts;
Or, again, more sweetly than the pipes of Pan,
And more subtly still,
Can set our minds in dancing to their tune.

Words - the condensed medium of the poet,
His earthly wings to stretch our minds, our thoughts;
The writer's lance to prick us on his way,
To lean our panoramic views,
To sway our minds according to his whim.

But beware, for glib of tongue or neat of prose,
Words can trip and fiddle from their author's skill;
A warped mind can warp others too,
Bending us this way, and then that,
Fragmenting and distorting truth,
And us, unwary, helpless in their lethal net,
Caught in their dexterously woven snare.

Words - with their immense potential power
The written greater than the spoken;
A power for good or evil, far truth or lies,
Their thoughts' impingement
A medium of tremendous force.
And yet, when alongside the mind's flitting speed,
Thoughts that sting the waters of our spirit state;
Brief patterns that embrace in depth,
And then move on,
Faster than the lightning's bolt,
Faster even than the wish to think itself:
Then what brief is left for clumsy words
That shift with such a dragging pace,
Yet hold our minds in bound estate?

But in truth words hold tightly to their jealous power;
For while we are in body chained
Our thoughts capricious, nervous and uncertain,
Wandering here and there to any light-blown whim or fancy,

For all that we may think them sound;
Rudderless and lightly fettered,
Bounding from this obstacle or that,
And gaining little more than wounds upon the way.

Yet words, when properly struck from wisdom's well,
Can free the willing mind from its uncertain state;
Can show to us the path of Truth,
Of Life beyond the glittering scenes
Of worldly flash and wealth;
Can launch and guide our fleeter thoughts
And wing them truly on their way,
Straight as an arrow
Under the sure mind of masterly tongue or pen.

Yet I have no wish to play with words,
Only to use them to their fullest reach,
And wring each meaning dry;
To point so surely that the bold man's mind,
When reaching past the finite limit of the word,
Might bear with him the seeds of Life,
And search
And not go far astray.

Christopher V. Cardew, 1996.

CELESTIAL PLEA

Stay close to me, Lord,
For I am now on Earth;
Here, alas,
Where I can scarcely hear the whisper of your words.

Nought do I list in fact,
But the hollow, empty clamour of the World,
The perennial hustle of life,
And the rush of men's minds as they seek
Only to bend their business to their will.

Here truth is lost,
The delicate crushed and forgotten;
While I? I am pressed back in pain,
My mind's sensitive fronds
Battered by the coarse tunes of Earth
And the crude and wayward purposes in Man.

Christopher V. Cardew